

Lindsly H.

ADDRESS

OF

HARVEY LINDSLY,

PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION.

FROM THE MINUTES OF THE
TWELFTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION,
HELD IN THE CITY OF LOUISVILLE, MAY 3, 1859.

PHILADELPHIA:
COLLINS, PRINTER, 705 JAYNE STREET.
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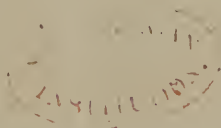


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A D D R E S S .

GENTLEMEN OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION :

THE flight of time, in its rapid course, has once more brought together the representatives of the medical profession, and we again meet in that section of our favored land whose history is most vividly emblematic of the progress of American power, its magic increase, and its almost boundless extent. This beautiful city, now teeming with an overflowing population, distinguished by its wealth, enterprise, and commerce, connected by its railroads and magnificent steamers with every part of the great West—with its refined society, its elevated educational institutions, its numerous churches, its noble charities—within the memory of many of our number was only an inconsiderable village, unknown, and without a place upon the map of the world.

May our profession keep pace—in respectability, progress, and usefulness, with the unexampled growth of our great country—and with the blessing of a superintending Providence, may we thus continue to meet in harmony and concord, as long as the Ohio and the Mississippi shall roll their ceaseless floods in fraternal union to the boundless ocean.

My able predecessor, in the last annual address, has told you what our Association has done, during the brief period of its existence, for the improvement of medical education, the advancement of medical science, and the elevation of the medical profession. I propose to devote the half hour, usually allotted to this exercise, in discussing one or two points, in which changes may, perhaps, be advantageously made in our mode of transacting the business that calls us together—and closing with some observations of a more general character.

And I would first take the liberty of suggesting the great importance of adhering strictly to the order of business as laid down

in our Constitution. That after the preliminary arrangements, relating exclusively to the organization of the Association, as the election of officers, &c., have been completed, the *chief* object of our meetings, viz., the reading of the reports of the regular committees, should be commenced and proceeded with, without interruption, till all have been presented. This certainly is the least that can with propriety be given to gentlemen, who have spent much time and devoted earnest labor to the preparation of reports, honorable to themselves and to the profession, and calculated to be useful to the community. It is earnestly to be hoped that the injustice inflicted at the last annual meeting, of neglecting to call for the reports of several of the most laborious and valuable committees, will never be repeated.

Allow me, too, to invite attention to what seems a serious defect in the mode in which the peculiar duties of the Nominating Committee are performed. The practice of placing upon that committee one member from each State and Territory, with an *equal* vote, without reference to the number of delegates he may represent, is clearly in violation of the fundamental principle of representative government. One State, for example, may send eighty delegates, and another only one, and yet according to our present plan, in the Nominating Committee, the former would have no more weight or influence than the latter. I would propose that hereafter this committee be composed as at present, of one member from each delegation; but that when the committee is organized, each member's vote be counted as equal to the whole number present from his district or territory. The number in attendance from each State, being certified by the Secretary, there need be no confusion, delay, or uncertainty in taking the vote. With great deference I would submit, that this change would be both just and expedient; just, because in all bodies the representation should as far as possible be in proportion to the number of the constituency; expedient, because such an arrangement would be a strong inducement in the various bodies represented to send a large delegation, thus increasing the interest and adding to the importance of our annual meetings.

In connection with this subject, I would recommend that it be made the duty of the Secretaries to prepare for the Committee of Nominations a complete list of all the subjects referred to committees at former meetings, together with the names placed on such committees. This would greatly aid that important body in the

discharge of its arduous duties, as it would enable its members to see at a glance what subjects had been acted on at all former annual meetings, thus saving much valuable time, and avoiding the mistake of repeating the same questions and placing the same individuals on committees where they had previously served. Some complaint has already been made in relation to such errors, which seem unavoidable as matters have been hitherto managed, while with the change suggested these errors need never occur.

The grand object of our Association, the elevation of the great body of the medical profession to greater respectability and more extended usefulness, is still far from being adequately accomplished. While much has been done—enough to encourage us to more earnest effort—a great deal remains to be done. In this direction, the great want is a more thorough preliminary and professional education. This is admitted on all hands; but to find and apply the remedy is a task at once difficult and ungracious. It is not my intention, however, to discuss a subject upon which the energies and acuteness of many of the ablest minds in the profession have already been expended, and, I trust, not altogether in vain. It is a question whose importance it is impossible to overrate, and I think on that account attention should always be called to it, in the hope that by keeping it constantly before the profession some progress may annually be made. The lead in this great enterprise should undoubtedly be taken by the medical schools, and the movement which was inaugurated at the last regular meeting, of calling a convention of these institutions to consider this subject, we trust will be attended with beneficial results. Little can be done, except by concert and a mutual understanding. It has been said that the responsibility as to this subject rests with the profession at large; that the preliminary education of students in particular, which in importance is hardly secondary to that which directly prepares them for the practice of their calling, must rest with the individual physicians who receive them as pupils. But the answer to this is obvious; and while we would earnestly impress upon all their duty in this respect, it is impossible there can be any concert of action among the forty thousand medical men scattered all over our great country, whereas concert ought certainly to be practicable among thirty or forty medical schools. I will not attempt to show how this can best be done; but I trust I shall be pardoned for saying that the American Medical Association expects it to be done—expects that those who are placed as sentinels at the great portals

of our profession, will see to it, that none shall be allowed to enter within its venerable halls, unless thoroughly prepared to discharge all its important responsibilities with honor to themselves and advantage to the public.

It is the common cant of the charlatan and the empiric, that the medical profession are opposed to improvement and lag behind in this age of progress, because we do not at once adopt every vague theory or favor every wild scheme that the visionary or the enthusiast may attempt to thrust upon us.

But I think every candid and philosophic mind that has studied the history and observed the progress of medical science, particularly for the last fifty years, will be satisfied that we have in a remarkable degree combined earnestness of research into the value of new theories and novel remedies, with a wise and cautious reserve as to their adoption in practice. We have illustrated the possibility of the union of progress and conservatism, of the combination of the ardor characteristic of youth and the wisdom that belongs to age. We are emphatically what our title denotes—and we eschew every other designation—we are Physicians,¹ students of nature, and are ever ready and anxious to put under contribution every part of her wide domain, and draw from her ample storehouse whatever can add to the happiness or contribute to the health of man. Give us a fact, authentic and well attested, no matter what its source, whether the result of accident, or the contribution of ignorance, or brought forward by any of the numerous claimants to superior knowledge, who ever hang on the outskirts of our profession, like the marauding followers of a victorious army, no matter, I say, whence its origin, give us a valuable theory or a useful fact, and we are prepared to adopt and make the most of it. The diamond of truth we always welcome, even if found amid the refuse of the gutter.

Thousands of physicians, among the ablest and most thoroughly educated men to be found in any of the pursuits of life, are constantly employed throughout Christendom in the earnest investigation of medical science, and their discoveries are instantly made known, almost with lightning speed, to the profession in every part of the civilized world. The quarterly, monthly, and weekly medical journals, issued in every portion of Europe and this country, are received and read by all intelligent members of the profession, and thus every important discovery in science or improvement in

¹ From *φυσικς*.

practice, no matter where it may originate, whether on the banks of the Seine, the Thames, the Delaware, or the Ohio, is at once appropriated by every scientific physician from St. Petersburg to Constantinople, and from Maine to California. Of what other profession or pursuit can it be said, that the electric chain of sympathy thus binds together in harmonious union its scattered members all over the world?

Indeed, medicine is the only one of the so-called learned professions that can be said to partake of the onward movements of the age. In theology, the eternal truths impressed on its every page forbid change or variation, and admit only of attempts at new modes of illustration. The grand principles of law, too, should be as fixed and unchangeable as the everlasting dictates of justice, of right and of wrong, though most unprejudiced persons, perhaps, would be inclined to admit that a slight improvement might occasionally be made, as to the way in which these principles are applied to practice. Its worst enemies, however, would not deny that some amelioration has taken place since the days of the English judge who is said to have shed tears on learning that the law, inflicting the penalty of death for stealing five shillings, had been repealed.

That our profession has been true to its high and noble calling—that it has deeply felt and wisely pondered its responsibilities to itself and its obligations to society, a brief recital of some of the useful and important improvements and discoveries that have been made in every branch of medical science during the last half century, will fully demonstrate; and perhaps a portion of the time usually devoted to this annual address, cannot be better employed than in bringing before the profession and the world its own claims to public consideration.

In looking back to the close of the last century, and tracing the progress of science, the march of intellect, the triumph of mind over matter, we are lost in amazement, and bewildered by the very splendor of the view that meets us on every hand. We feel proud of our common humanity; we are disposed to exclaim with the poet—

“What a piece of work is man!

How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties!”

And in all this progress, in all these splendid triumphs, in all that tends to ennoble human nature, to elevate human character, to

correct physical evils, and lessen human suffering, our profession has always borne a prominent and leading part. Even in other departments of knowledge not immediately connected with medical pursuits—in the cultivation of all the natural sciences especially—we have done more than others. A large proportion of the most valuable papers contributed to the Royal Society of London, and published in its *Transactions*, have been furnished by physicians.

Look at the splendid array of discoveries, inventions and improvements in chemistry, in surgery, in midwifery, in therapeutics, in practical medicine, and first on the long roll of professional triumphs, examine with a scrutinizing eye Jenner's claims to the gratitude and veneration of the world; for although this matter has been discussed so often, its overwhelming importance is not yet fully appreciated by the public. See the medical philosopher in his secluded country home, carefully studying this subject through many tedious years; for his discovery was not the result of a lucky accident—not the inspiration of an electric flash of genius, but was perfected by cautious experiment, by accurate observation, by rigid scrutiny, by careful induction, until the mighty truth was fully evolved, that smallpox—the direst scourge of the human race, the despoiler of beauty, the destroyer of vision—was shorn of its power, and might be banished from the world. It has recently been stated by the chief director of the Imperial Hospital for the Blind at Paris, that before the discovery, of vaccination *one-half* of the children sent to that institution lost their sight as a consequence of smallpox. Some faint idea of the incalculable value of vaccination may be obtained from the fact that, before 1805, when it had become pretty general, 16 out of every 100 deaths were caused by this disease, which, with the present record of mortality of London, would give us the enormous number of 10,000 annually in that city alone. How much nobler might be the boast of Jenner than that of the celebrated architect who exclaimed, in looking at the towering walls of the great cathedral: “*Si monumentum requiris, circumspice,*” for he could say, “*My monument is the WHOLE WORLD, wherever disease has existed and science triumphed. ‘It shines in every fresh and healthy face;’ its glories are embalmed in the record of every family Bible; it is not in one cathedral, but around every hearthstone.*”

But, alas! how has the world manifested its appreciation of benevolence and genius? The British government bestowed £30,000 on Jenner, the saviour of many *millions* of human lives,

and £400,000 on Wellington, the successful victor on a few battle fields.

While the benefits derived from controlling the ravages of small-pox are perhaps more striking from its fatal and loathsome character, than those arising from any other single improvement or discovery in medicine, yet there are many others almost as important, which have contributed greatly to the health, comfort, and happiness of man. Of these, the history of scurvy furnishes one of the most striking examples. In times as recent as Captain Cook's, a confinement of a few months on shipboard invariably led to the prevalence of this dreaded scourge, laying prostrate one-half of the crew, proving fatal to one-fourth, and enfeebling the whole. While now, owing to more accurate knowledge of its pathology, its causes and means of prevention, it is of very rare occurrence, is readily controlled, and is seldom if ever fatal. The improved sanitary condition of the English navy is clearly exhibited in the fact that in 1779, one in eight of those employed died annually, while in 1811, the ratio was reduced to one in thirty-two, and in 1836 to one in seventy-two.

In the treatment of insanity and the management of the insane, what a vast improvement has been made within the last few years! Contrast the chains, the dungeons, the confinement, the violence, the beds of straw, or, what was more usual, the bare floor of mud or stone, the deprivation in fine of all the decencies and all the comforts of life; contrast all this with the kindness, the watchful care, the freedom from undue restraint, the skilful medical treatment, the palatial residences arising all over the civilized world for this unhappy class, and then estimate, if you can, how much they owe to the medical profession.

The importance of ventilation to comfort, health, and life, can hardly be overrated, and to medical science is almost exclusively due whatever improvement has been made in this respect in our public and private edifices. A vast deal, to be sure, yet remains to be done, but this must rest with architects, builders, and the people themselves, after the evils of breathing impure air have been so often and so thoroughly exposed by the profession. A single illustration on this subject must suffice. In the Dublin Lying-in Hospital, the deaths of new-born infants between the ages of one and fifteen days, amounted, in the course of four years, to 2,944 out of 7,650 births, which were at once reduced to only 279 deaths during the same period, after a new and improved system of ven-

tilation had been adopted. Thus, more than 400 lives per annum were saved in a single institution.

Even consumption, the most fatal of all diseases, causing one-sixth of all the deaths north of the tropics, seems destined to yield, before the triumphant march of modern medical science. At least, it can no longer claim to be the resistless conqueror, before whom human skill and human power must flee away abashed and discomfited. The hectic flush on the cheek of youthful beauty shall no longer be regarded as the certain presage of an early and untimely grave—shall no longer be dreaded as Death's crimson banner, waving in triumph over the prostrate hopes of parents, relatives, and friends.

More correct views of its pathological conditions, and more skilful adaptation of therapeutic measures, recently introduced, lead us to hope that the day is not far distant when consumption will be shorn of its terrors, and take its humble place along with other *curable* diseases.

The discovery and application of anæsthetic agents marks another important era in the history of professional progress. If this great boon to suffering humanity has not accomplished all that its sanguine advocates at first claimed for it; if it has not smoothed forever the knotted brow of agony, it has yet prevented many a pang, soothed the anguish of many a pillow, and been the means of saving many a life.

The triumphs of auscultation and the stethoscope belong to the early part of the nineteenth century. These have now become so familiar to the profession and the public, that we are apt to forget—though older physicians have cause enough to remember it—what a vast improvement they have effected in the diagnosis, and, of course, in the treatment of diseases of the chest.

The careful examination and thorough chemical analysis of the blood and the various secretions of the human body, entirely unknown fifty years ago, have thrown a flood of light on an extensive, obscure, and most important class of diseases.

The skilful application of medical chemistry in aid of medical jurisprudence, has been of incalculable value in the exposure of crime and the detection of criminals, so that even the secrets of the grave are brought to light and no longer afford protection to the midnight assassin.

Public hygiene, the proper drainage and sewerage of cities, and the prevention and control of infectious diseases, have all received

careful attention from medical men, to the great advantage of the public health.

The application of the microscope to the study of anatomy and the minute examination of diseased structure is of recent introduction, and has already furnished a rich harvest of important discovery to the earnest student.

The treatment of affections of the throat has been greatly improved by the novel use of local applications—a valuable contribution to medical science by an American physician.

Our intermittent, bilious, and congestive fevers have been placed under almost complete control by the use of large doses of quinine, an improvement hardly second in importance to any which has adorned the present century. To our country belongs the credit of this invaluable addition to our therapeutic resources.

The education, development, and improvement of the cretin, the idiot, and the demented, are almost *wholly* owing to the nobly disinterested and skilfully directed efforts of physicians; and in no form of philanthropic labor has there been a greater success achieved or greater good effected.

Midwifery, in all its various departments, bears witness to the successful labors of medical science. New and valuable instruments, operations before unknown, remedies and remedial appliances recently introduced, have rendered the pathology and treatment of the accidents and diseases of this important branch of the profession much more exact, thorough, and reliable than those resorted to by our predecessors. Among these great improvements, perhaps the most important of all, the only successful treatment of vesico-vaginal fistula is due to the genius, skill, and perseverance of a member of this Association.¹

In surgery, time would fail us in the attempt to particularize the changes, the improvements, the discoveries, the inventions that meet us on every side. Since the commencement of the present century, the art has not merely been revolutionized, it has been created anew. The old landmarks have been swept away, so that scarcely a vestige of the labors of our predecessors remains. There is hardly an instrument or an operation that has not undergone some material change or been superseded altogether, while new instruments and new operations are continually being introduced, so that surgery, as now practised, may be said to be a modern art.

¹ In obstetric practice, fifty years since, one in sixty died; while now, according to the most reliable estimates, only one in two hundred and fifty.

Dislocations are reduced by simpler and less painful manipulations; fractures are healed by apparatus and appliances more skillfully adapted and more successfully employed; amputations and other operations are performed with instruments of novel design and improved construction; wounds are treated by dressings and applications better suited to their nature, and more likely to effect a rapid cure; deformities, congenital and accidental, which formerly were allowed to harass and disfigure the patient for life, are more promptly and effectually removed; the blind are restored to sight, the deaf are enabled to hear, and the lame to walk; life is daily saved from the aneurismal flood, from the bursting tumor, from the mortifying extremity, from impending tetanus; and, above all, the great glory of modern surgery is its conservative character, that life is often preserved and deformity removed or prevented, not by the use of the knife or the scalpel, but by avoiding both, and by waiting on nature with greater patience and aiding her with greater skill.¹

If the next half century shall witness a progress as rapid, discoveries as important, and improvements as striking, as have marked that we have just left behind us, we shall richly deserve the thanks of the world and the gratitude of posterity.

It was the boast of Augustus, that arch-traitor to the liberties of his country, "that he found Rome of brick and left it of marble," and of Buonaparte, "that he found France without law and left it the 'code Napoleon,'" a monument to his matchless ability, before which the splendid triumphs of Austerlitz and Marengo sink into comparative insignificance. How much nobler might be the boast of the American Medical Association, if we, in future years, should be able to say—though we found the profession the prey of the charlatan and the empiric, we left it distinguished by science and ennobled by virtue—found it chaotic and discordant, we left it organized and harmonious—found it with the education of its members too much neglected, we left it with medical schools of the highest character and physicians in the foremost rank of science and learning—found it without its due weight or influence in society, we left it honored by the rich and sustained by the blessings of the poor.

¹ The records of the Parisian hospitals show that in 1805 one in seven died, while now the ratio is reduced to one in twelve, a gain of 71 per cent. in fifty years.



